

THE ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY
OF
THE ENGLISH NATION

(b) BOOK I

PREFACE

TO THE MOST GLORIOUS KING CEOLWULPH, BEDE, THE
SERVANT OF CHRIST AND PRIEST

I FORMERLY, at your request, most readily transmitted to you the Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, which I had newly published, for you to read, and give it your approbation; and I now send it again to be transcribed, and more fully considered at your leisure. And I cannot but commend the sincerity and zeal, with which you not only diligently give ear to hear the words of the Holy Scripture, but also industriously take care to become acquainted with the actions and sayings of former men of renown, especially of our own nation. For if history relates good things of good men, the attentive hearer is excited to imitate that which is good; or if it mentions evil things of wicked persons, nevertheless the religious and pious hearer or reader, shunning that which is hurtful and perverse, is the more earnestly excited to perform those things which he knows to be good, and worthy of God. Of which you also being deeply sensible, are desirous that the said history should be more fully made familiar to yourself, and to those over whom the Divine Authority has appointed you governor, from your great regard to their general welfare. But to the end that I may remove all occasion of doubting what I have written, both from yourself and other readers or hearers of this history, I will take care briefly to intimate from what authors I chiefly learned the same.

My principal authority and aid in this work was the

1
ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE (a)

In the year when 494¹ years had passed from Christ's birth, Cerdic and his son Cynric landed at *Cerdicesora* with five ships; and Cerdic was the son of Elesa, the son of Esla, the son of Gewis, the son of Wig, the son of Freawine, the son of Frithugar, the son of Brond, the son of Bældæg, the son of Woden.

And six years² after they had landed they conquered the kingdom of the West Saxons, and they were the first kings who conquered the land of the West Saxons from the Britons. And he held the kingdom for 16 years, and when he died, his son Cynric succeeded to the kingdom and held it [for 26 years. When he died, his son Ceawlin succeeded and held it]³ for 17⁴ years. When he died, Ceol succeeded to the kingdom, and held it for six⁵ years. When he died, his brother Ceolwulf succeeded and he reigned 17 years, and their descent goes back to Cerdic. Then Cynegils, the son of Ceolwulf's brother, succeeded to the kingdom and reigned 31⁶ years, and he was the first of the kings of the West Saxons to receive baptism. And then Cenwealh succeeded, and held it for 31 years, and Cenwealh was Cynegils's son.

2 Bede's Ecclesiastical History

learned and reverend Abbot Albinus; who, educated in the Church of Canterbury by those venerable and learned men, Archbishop Theodore of blessed memory, and the Abbot Adrian, transmitted to me by Nothelm, the pious priest of the Church of London, either in writing, or by word of mouth of the same Nothelm, all that he thought worthy of memory, that had been done in the province of Kent, or the adjacent parts, by the disciples of the blessed Pope Gregory, as he had learned the same either from written records, or the traditions of his ancestors. The same Nothelm, afterwards going to Rome, having, with leave of the present Pope Gregory, searched into the archives of the holy Roman Church, found there some epistles of the blessed Pope Gregory, and other popes; and returning home, by the advice of the aforesaid most reverend father Albinus, brought them to me, to be inserted in my history. Thus, from the beginning of this volume to the time when the English nation received the faith of Christ, have we collected the writings of our predecessors, and from them gathered matter for our history; but from that time till the present, what was transacted in the Church of Canterbury, by the disciples of St. Gregory or their successors, and under what kings the same happened, has been conveyed to us by Nothelm through the industry of the aforesaid Abbot Albinus. They also partly informed me by what bishops and under what kings the provinces of the East and West Saxons, as also of the East Angles, and of the Northumbrians, received the faith of Christ. In short I was chiefly encouraged to undertake this work by the persuasions of the same Albinus. In like manner, Daniel, the most reverend Bishop of the West Saxons, who is still living, communicated to me in writing some things relating to the Ecclesiastical History of that province, and the next adjoining to it of the South Saxons, as also of the Isle of Wight. But how, by the pious ministry of Cedd and Ceadda, the province of the Mercians was brought to the faith of Christ, which they knew not before, and how that of the East Saxons recovered the same, after having expelled it, and how those fathers lived and died, we learned from the brethren of the monastery, which was built by them, and is called Lastingham. What ecclesiastical transactions took place in the province of the East Angles, was partly made known to

Bede's Ecclesiastical History

3

us from the writings and tradition of our ancestors, and partly by relation of the most reverend Abbot Esius. What was done towards promoting the faith, and what was the sacerdotal succession in the province of Lindsey, we had either from the letters of the most reverend prelate Cunebert, or by word of mouth from other persons of good credit. But what was done in the Church throughout the province of the Northumbrians, from the time when they received the faith of Christ till this present, I received not from any particular author, but by the faithful testimony of innumerable witnesses, who might know or remember the same; besides what I had of my own knowledge. Wherein it is to be observed, that what I have written concerning our most holy father, Bishop Cuthbert, either in this volume, or in my treatise on his life and actions, I partly took, and faithfully copied from what I found written of him by the brethren of the Church of Lindisfarne; but at the same time took care to add such things as I could myself have knowledge of by the faithful testimony of such as knew him. And I humbly entreat the reader, that if he shall in this that we have written find anything not delivered according to the truth, he will not impute the same to me, who, as the true rule of history requires, have laboured sincerely to commit to writing such things as I could gather from common report, for the instruction of posterity.

Moreover, I beseech all men who shall hear or read this history of our nation, that for my manifold infirmities both of mind and body, they will offer up frequent supplications to the throne of Grace. And I further pray, that in recompense for the labour wherewith I have recorded in the several countries and cities those events which were most worthy of note, and most grateful to the ears of their inhabitants, I may for my reward have the benefit of their pious prayers.

PREFACE TO BOOK III.

INCITED by different motives, both Normans and English have written of king William: the former have praised him to excess, alike extolling to the utmost his good and his bad actions; while the latter, out of national hatred, have laden their conqueror with undeserved reproach. For my part, as the blood of each people flows in my veins, I shall steer a middle course; where I am certified of his good deeds, I shall openly proclaim them; his bad conduct I shall touch upon lightly and sparingly, though not so as to conceal it; so that neither shall my narrative be condemned as false, nor will I brand that man with ignominious censure, almost the whole of whose actions may reasonably be excused, if not commended. Wherefore I shall willingly and carefully relate such particulars of him as may be matter of incitement to the indolent, of example to the enterprising, useful to the present age, and pleasing to posterity. But I shall spend little time in relating such things as are of service to no one, and which produce disgust in the reader, as well as ill-will to the author. There are always people, more than sufficient, ready to detract from the actions of the noble: my course of proceeding will be, to extenuate evil, as much as can be done consistently with the sacrifice of truth, and not to bestow excessive commendation even on good actions. For this moderation all true judges will, I imagine, esteem me neither timid nor unskilful. And this rule, too, my history will regard equally, with respect both to William and his two sons; that nothing shall be dwelt on too fondly, nothing untrue be admitted. The elder of these did little worthy of praise, if we except the early part of his reign; gaining, throughout the whole of his life, the favour of the military at the expense of the people. The second, more obedient to his father than to his brother, possessed his spirit, unsubdued either by prosperity or adversity: on regarding his warlike expeditions, it is matter of doubt whether he was more cautious or more bold; on contemplating their event, whether he was more fortunate or unsuccessful. There will be a time, however, when the reader may judge for himself. I am now about to begin my third volume; and I think I have said enough to make him attentive, and disposed to be instructed; his own feelings will persuade him to be candid.

WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY

PREFACE TO THE HISTORY OF HIS OWN TIMES.

Addressed to Robert, Earl of Gloucester.

To his most loving lord, Robert, son of king Henry, and earl of Gloucester, William, the Librarian of Malmesbury, wishes, after completing his victorious course on earth, eternal triumph in heaven. Many of the transactions of your father, of glorious memory, I have not omitted to record, both in the fifth book of my Regal History, and in those three smaller volumes, which I have intitled Chronicles.¹ Your highness is now desirous that those events which, through the miraculous power of God, have taken place in recent times, in England, should be transmitted to posterity; truly, like all your other desires, a most noble one. For what more concerns the advancement of virtue, what more conduces to justice, than to recognise the Divine favour towards good men, and his vengeance upon the wicked? What, too, more grateful, than to commit to the page of history the exploits of brave men, by whose example others may shake off their indolence, and take up arms in defence of their country? As this task is committed to my pen, I think the narrative will proceed with exacter order, if, going back a little, I trace the series of years from the return of the empress into England, after the death of her husband. First, therefore, invoking the help of God, as is fitting, and purposing to write the truth, without listening to enmity, or sacrificing to favour, I shall begin as follows.

¹ Terentii Andria, i. 1.

² What these were is unknown, as it is believed that there is no MS. of them now to be met with.

(e)

WILLIAM OF Jumièges, DEEDS OF THE NORMAN DUKES

DEDICATORY LETTER

To William, the holy, victorious, and orthodox king of the English by grace of the highest King's authority, William, monk of Jumièges, unworthiest of all monks, wishes the strength of Samson to crush his enemies and the profundity of Solomon to establish justice.¹

Most prudent and serene king, I have woven together this work on the deeds of the dukes of the Normans out of excerpts from several volumes, as far as the poverty of my capacity allowed me, and, dedicating it to your Highness, I have decided to assign it to the library of chronicles for the recollection of the exemplary deeds of your most pious predecessors in this most exalted of secular offices. I have sought to do so, not in the elegant and weighty style used by rhetoricians, nor with the venal wit and glitter of polished utterance, but in an unadorned style and plain language that is simple and clear for every reader. Your majesty is surrounded by illustrious men excellently versed and learned in letters, who with drawn swords patrol the city, preventing the plots of the wicked, and so try to protect with unceasing vigilance the couch of the Solomon of the divine law.² Many have testified in different ways that the vigour of that fine genius which the celestial steward has bestowed upon you by his prerogative is equipped with wonderful efficiency either in warfare or in other matters which you propose to undertake and contemplate doing. Please take this small gift of my trivial labour in your kindly hand and call to mind through these pages the noble deeds most worthy of bright remembrance both of your own and of ancient times.

I have drawn the first part of the narrative down to Richard II from the history of Dudo, a skilled man who diligently sought out from Count Rodulf, brother of Richard I, what he wrote down for

DEEDS OF THE NORMAN DUKES

7

posterity. I offer the rest, partly related by many persons trustworthy on account equally of their age and their experience, and partly based on the most assured evidence of what I have witnessed myself, from my own store. I have, however, cut out from my history the genealogy of Rollo, born of heathen parents and spending much of his life as a heathen until he was reborn in sacred infancy at the font, source of salvation, as well as his dream and many other matters of that kind, for I consider that they are merely flattering, and do not offer a model of what is honourable or edifying.¹ However, let him who accuses a servant of sacred learning of presumption or any other fault in undertaking such a study know what I consider the not superfluous motive for this little work, namely that the excellent virtues of outstanding men in secular as well as in divine affairs, who live blessedly in God's eyes, should also live in men's perception in a way that is beneficial. It is, however, not fitting for one who, in order to embrace with a merciful heart the greatness of the heavenly Jerusalem, is enclosed by the claustral walls, and is cut off from the world out of reverence for the monastic habit and the profession of the religious life, to be seduced by the attraction of popular esteem with its soft but wicked allurements, and by that allurements to be entangled in the world. Here, wise conqueror of kingdoms, you have both your own peace and wars and those of your holy father the most glorious Duke Robert, and of your earlier ancestors, who were renowned leaders of the terrestrial army, striving for heaven in utmost sincerity of faith, in very eager hope and fervent love, and who above all were valiant soldiers of Christ and His zealous worshippers. May the Emperor who rules the eternal empire, trusting in whom you trampled underfoot the many dangerous perils, triumphing in a series of miraculous and admirable successes; may this most powerful of all guardians protect you in all your undertakings and may the wisdom in ruling which He bestowed upon you defend you until the fortunate course of your earthly reign comes to an end and you, holy, victorious, and orthodox king, adorned with the ring and stole of eternal glory, may be admitted into the heavenly palace of true and greatest bliss.

ORDERIC VITAMS, NAME OF ST EVROU

Here begins the fifth book of the Ecclesiastical History

I

As our masters have taught by their example we ought ceaselessly to shun the sin of idleness, and by devoting ourselves wholeheartedly to useful study and profitable activity arm ourselves to triumph against all evil with wholesome discipline, and cleanse our souls to make them free from sin. 'The slothful man', says Solomon, 'is a slave to desire'; and again, 'The desire of the slothful killeth him'.¹ And that man is slothful and idle who abandons himself to vice because he lacks the will for good. He who does not meditate on the law of the Lord by day and night²—that is, in prosperity and adversity—and does not resist the wiles of Satan by wrestling with him to earn the prize of heavenly life, is rightly thought to be a slave to idleness. Never doubt that fatal lusts destroy this man, leading him as he stagnates in prosperity to active evil, along the broad highway of his own voluptuousness until he is plunged into the pit of damnation. So our masters utterly condemn sloth and idleness as enemies of the soul,³ and by word and deed encourage their disciples to useful toil and labour. On this indeed the pagan poets agree with Christian writers. For Virgil says:

What profit toil or even worthy deeds?⁴
Toil conquers all,
Reckless toil, and want that drives through hardships.⁵

And Ovid too gives this advice against venery to those who seek to curb their lust:

Sloth rots the mind, and breaks the body's health.⁶
Be warned by me, and shun all idleness.⁷
Drive sloth away; then Cupid's bows fall slack;
His torches flicker out and have no fire.⁸

BOOK V

So, Father Warin,¹ weighing in my mind these and other such arguments, I resolved to compose something which may bring profit or pleasure to some of the servants in the house of God, and so render account of the knowledge I have acquired that when the Lord comes to judgement I shall not be condemned along with the idle servant who hid his talent in the earth.² I gladly obeyed the commands first given by our reverend father, Abbot Roger,³ and afterwards by you, to begin a modest account of the church of Saint-Evroul, which our predecessors urged each other to undertake but each for his part shrank from undertaking. All were more ready to be silent than to speak, and preferred a quiet routine to the exacting task of investigating past events. They were only too willing to read the deeds of their abbots and of the brethren of their house, and to learn of the building up of its modest property, first given by its poor but pious founders and patiently augmented by the continual care of its father abbots; but they shrank from bending their minds to the task of composing or writing down their traditions. So in the end I, who came here from the remote parts of Mercia as a ten-year-old English boy, an ignorant stranger of another race thrown amongst folk who know, have endeavoured by God's grace to commit to writing an account of the deeds of the Normans for Normans to read. Already with God's aid I have completed two books⁴ in which I have given a brief account of the refoundation of our house and its first three abbots, with some other events of that period, truthfully recording what I had laboriously learned from the oldest monks. Now I shall embark on a third book, beginning in the year of our Lord 1075, and treating of my own abbot and the community of Saint-Evroul and the events that took place for the next twelve years, up to the death of King William. I have chosen to begin this book in the year in which I first saw the light of day; for I was born on 16 February 1075, and reborn in baptism on the following Holy Saturday⁵ by the ministry of the priest Orderic at Atcham, in St. Eata's church on the bank of the Severn. Five years later my father gave me into the charge of a noble priest called Steward⁶ to learn my letters, and for five years I studied the first rudiments of

¹ 4 April 1075.
² Steward was a priest serving the church of St. Peter, Shrewsbury, which Roger of Montgomery had given to Orderic's father, Odelerius (Le Prévost, v. 134; below, p. 146).

BOOK V

9

learning under his instruction. But in my eleventh year my father renounced his share in me for the love of God, and sent me out of England into Normandy, an exile of tender years, to enter the service of the eternal king. Thereupon I was received by Abbot Mainer,¹ and clothed in the honourable habit of the monastic order; since then, joined for ever to the community of monks by a solemn vow, I have gladly borne the easy yoke of the Lord for forty-two years, and with my companions have joyfully walked in the way of God, as the Rule prescribes, to the best of my ability, striving to learn the customs and service of the Church and always devoting my mind to work of some worth.

If our bishops and